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ABSTRACT

Foreign language teaching is held up and mirrored against current social realities and the "contemporary scene" and found to be lacking in both content and appeal. To combat certain negative trends in the teaching profession, the author discusses five characteristics of education now considered to be vital to successful teaching. They include the concepts that language instruction should be oriented toward: (1) a student-centered curriculum, (2) linguistically developed programs, (3) new media and technology, (4) development of proficiency, and (5) concern for basic moral values. Integration of these principles is suggested as a means of improving the teaching of English as a second language or dialect to speakers of non-standard English. (RI)

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TEACHING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE AS A MODEL
FOR FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING*

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It is difficult to pretend modesty when the premise upon which the invitation to speak at this Conference implies that I have had a wealth of professional experience to make some contribution to the further development and possible improvement of second-language teaching. The details of the myriad facets of my work are not of major concern, but the total experience must be emphasized to justify my morose attitude, lest it be thought that I am pessimistic because I am left out and my counsel is ignored.

One may well ask why so much work and participation becomes the burden of such a limited number of persons. Unfortunately, this reflects the inherent malady of education today. Teaching for many has become a job -- in fact it has for many the character of piece work. Every effort is made to turn out the required pieces with a minimum amount of effort and at a maximum rate of pay. The goal is to balance the factors of teaching hours, student load, research and community service so that relative mediocrity can be insured at higher salaries with decreasing effort. Innovation in instruction, concern for the student, commitment to the institution are considered deterring factors causing imbalance and are, therefore, avoided as detrimental. Advocates of these principles of teaching are alienated as difficult persons.

I, therefore, am tremendously disappointed by the established indifference of teachers and especially foreign language teachers to the contemporary scene. Several experiences underscore this disappointment. After a great deal of effort by a hard core of leaders of the foreign language teaching profession, the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) has not grown to more than 8,000 members, although there are more than 90,000 foreign language teachers in the United States and Canada. The Modern Language Journal subscription totals remain relatively stable at less than 6% of potential subscribers in spite of the efforts we have made to expand the size, raise the quality and diversify the appeal and at that half the members of ACTFL were already long-term subscribers to the Journal. The state organizations on which the broad representative concept of ACTFL was to be based have declined rather than increased in potential power to improve foreign language teaching. In the State of Wisconsin it is estimated that there are 2,200 foreign language teachers, but only about 130 actually belong to the State organization. In addition most of these pay only \$1.00 annual dues. This is ridiculous in itself. No organization can command respect by offering itself to a potential member for \$1.00. Here it

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should be noted that the foreign language teachers at all levels have been stingy and cheap in offering any support to professional organizations. In addition they have done little for themselves. Now that the support of the National Defense Education Act has been withdrawn, many states are losing their supervisors. College programs for teacher training remain divested of any influence of the now historically enshrined NDEA institutes.

The tremendous problem of the foreign language teaching profession is its complete isolation from reality and the contemporary revolutionary scene. Examine the textbooks you are using. What does each tell the student about the life of an average person in Germany -- Austria of course is rarely mentioned -- in Spain, or in Latin America -- which is still considered one entity without delineating the profound distinctions between the many peoples included in this conglomerate concept -- in France or the almost completely ignored French speaking Africa or the forgotten Belgium. What do students learn that makes them fully aware of the forces shaping the lives of human beings everywhere so that they have a basis for making comparisons? How do descriptions of the geranium pots in the flower boxes of Paris apartment windows of the pancho-clad and black-hatted Indians of Cuzco, of the Heidesque views of Alpine life, or of the Lorelei castles of the Rhine insure international understanding? These are questions the students not only want answered but must have answered if we are to convince them that ours is not a fairy-tale, romantically oriented discipline in which reason is not strained to find solutions for problems of such complexity, in which all lives on this planet, regardless of human barriers, now are completely intertwined.

Consider how the fate of the world population is dependent upon the use or misuse of oil. Foreign policy in the Near East is determined by the necessity to buy oil or the need to control its production. The welfare of the oceanic environment, of coastal regions in Louisiana, California, England, or San Francisco Bay, suffers from pollution over which governments often have no control because of international shipping agreements. Without oil whole civilizations, especially ours will come to a dead halt, and yet in our use of it we also continue the destruction of the vital air which we must breathe.

To say that these problems have no relevance to foreign language study, to insist that foreign language study is a skill in which the dexterity of manipulating sounds and symbols is a sufficient end itself, in which no support of content is required, is a philosophy of education evolved in a vacuum.

The necessity of teaching English as a Second Language or as a Second Dialect or of teaching Standard English to Speakers of Non-Standard English has not been thrust upon us by ourselves. Tremendous social forces have drawn us into this work because the growing functional illiteracy of adults in this country -- now estimated as a force involving 35 million persons -- is depleting the labor market and adding to the waste

of human resources and of the material wealth of those who pay the taxes. Thus the growing support of teaching English as a Second Language, the great dynamic interest demonstrated in the annual meetings of the American Association of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, the activist enthusiasm of the teachers at all levels and from all backgrounds demonstrates a total integration of academia with its social environment.

From this experience we have much to learn as foreign language teachers. The teaching of foreign languages in this country has never been linked to necessity of any kind. The fact that its origins lay in the study of humanistic Western culture, as manifested primarily in literature, has insured its complete isolation almost through the 20th Century. We are still trying to teach Dante, Cervantes, Molière, Goethe and others to students whose control of English is rooted in television advertising and western serials, in which distortions of English structure and grunts, sentence fragments and pantomime are the basic elements of communication. In fact anyone who has seen one of the American television serials such as Bonanza in a foreign version that he cannot understand will discover how little language contributes to understanding of the stereotyped plots. Thus after much effort with the mysteries of foreign literature, the ten percent who survive the frustrations and rigors of our discipline find themselves unable to cope with any tangible evidence of the language they may find in a foreign land.

I have personally found that the vitality of teaching English as a Second Language or Dialect to speakers of Non-Standard English depends upon the following five factors which are partially or totally absent from foreign language instruction. This leads me to believe that if they were present foreign language instruction would at long last find its basic necessity for existing in the curriculum of the 1970's at all levels of instruction.

Factor 1. The instruction is student oriented. Since the economy of the United States and at least that of Western Canada depends upon the use of English with sufficient proficiency to make oneself understood and to understand in return, intelligence is not a factor. It is assumed that persons of low intelligence have sufficient capacity to master the level of English their economic station in life will demand. Furthermore, the growing distrust of intelligence tests as an adequate measure of something not completely understood, would hardly encourage considering it as an element in evaluating student performance.

What is most important is the evaluation of each student as a person. His total sociological, psychological and anthropological orientation must be fully considered by the teacher if instruction is to be effective. The content of the teaching materials must reflect an understanding of all these elements of his personality. In short the teacher to be in any way successful must present himself constantly in a manner to win confidence and attention through demonstration of complete understanding of each student's need to learn English. For this reason most

successful teachers in this area are creative in adapting materials to the individual needs of students. Much of this creativity is bred from necessity since materials have not been abundant.

This type of creativity has been stifled to a great degree in foreign language study by a superabundance of organized materials in which the design was controlled by the predilections of the authors. Reflect upon a page of any book you are using and relate its content to the total personality of one student you select at random. My mind falls upon a Negro from the South, whose father and mother were both educated to be teachers in Southern black schools, who is learning how to order a meal in French in a French restaurant and at the same time state in precise Parisian French his predilection for either white or red wine, even though he has never been inside a restaurant in all his life. More emotionally in this context, I recall now five girls -- four Negro, one Puerto Rican, who saved money from their first student pay check so that they could invite my assistant to have lunch with them and thus be able to ask him to take them to a restaurant which offered service on white tablecloths with cloth napkins.

There is no evidence at all in our foreign language materials of the poverty, the desperation, the longing for the most elementary living refinements, the intellectual deprivation, the non-existent social motivation that is the warp and woof upon which the needlepoint patterns of foreign language study are being embroidered. The supermarket standardization of education to which we have been dedicated is collapsing and its effects in declining foreign language enrollees and in unmarketable Ph.D's is already a matter of professional concern.

Factor 2. Instruction is linguistically oriented. Each student no matter what his intellectual achievement or chronological age speaks some language. Whatever he speaks must have some code system to relate to an identical system or close approximation of it in another person. In short there must be communication or a common bond of language perception. It is apparent then that the original language system must be the background upon which the Standard English system is to be grafted. To introduce students to a sophisticated English system who have only a rudimentary system of their own leaves them not only bewildered but distrustful, since nowhere in their experience does the validity of the second system become apparent.

A recent radio broadcast included a statement by Paul Goodman that in a square mile of Harlem there may be as many as 68,000 people, and that an average child of twelve in this area has not ever been more than half a mile from his home. How do our methods of instruction reflect the presence of such children in our classrooms? What does the agreement of the past participle mean to them in any language? How much more important in motivating students is the attentive curiosity of a teacher to the varieties of speech patterns among students and the use of these as basic models for instructing them to appreciate the standardization of a second language. Skill in the second language thus

evolves with its own characteristic structure comprehended as a totality of communication experience and not as an exercise in rational analysis.

Factor 3. Instruction is technologically oriented. In a technological society it is impossible to maintain a semblance of relationship to it in academic environments without using technological aids to support teacher oriented instruction. The radio, television and movies are constantly present elements of reinforcements of language learning or of distraction from it and deterioration of the effects of instruction. Yet individuals of all ages probably learn much more from these instruments than they do from reading or sitting in classrooms. To be sure we are living in an environment in which English is the standard language. But ample equipment and materials are available for use in foreign language instruction as well. However, as a profession we have not become effectively organized to make all these resources available to ourselves.

More than a year ago I accepted a challenge. Our Dean was complaining that the University radio station was not being used for educational purposes or for supplementing instruction. In cooperation with the Department of German and the Director of the Radio Station, our studio manager developed a series of programs to supplement a course at the third-year college level which is an introduction to literature. Now at least twenty-five high schools are using these programs both on radio and on tape to supplement the German courses. Since the programs were announced in The Modern Language Journal¹ we are gaining nationwide distribution and the cooperation of various national organizations. This effort now has been expanded into a program which runs daily from five-to-six p.m., except Saturdays under the title "An Hour with the Department of Language Laboratories" in which programs in a variety of languages are included. Not all is success. Some of our academic departments resent our intrusion in their domain, even though they are not willing to undertake work of this type.

Our first effort, however, should be in the language laboratory which we have used in English instruction as a very useful instructional tool not only for drills and practice but for content instruction as well. We have taped a broad variety of course lectures by lecturers with decided idiosyncrasies of speech. These have been most useful in orienting students to the University and its academic offerings while at the same time instructing them in language. These same possibilities exist in foreign language instruction as well. We have had innumerable opportunities to record the voices of foreign visitors, many of great distinction and to supplement these with the great resources made available through the recording industry. If the will to instruct and to learn is present, then the effectiveness of the language laboratory can be established without elaborate research.

Factor 4. Instruction is oriented toward proficiency. No one has ever considered the possibility that we would teach English

to non-speakers of standard English as a four skills, audio-lingual or reading exercise. The students we are concerned with must gain a defined level of proficiency to perform satisfactorily within an expanding social environment. In fact, expansion of the environment, expansion of the economic opportunity, expansion of cultural horizons are dependent upon the use of English and proportionate to its developing proficiency.

Proficiency in this context is not an academic concept measurable by testing and recording of data. It is a behavioral concept indicated by the individual's constantly changing adjustment to the total social environment and his constantly growing awareness of the greater and greater complexity of the civilization in which he is involved. The degree to which he elevates himself from all forms of deprivation and the extent to which he becomes self-reliant in the social structure is the indication of his level of proficiency. To be sure at stages in this development English is not definable in terms of literature or literary standards, nor in terms of good or bad English or of correct or wrong English. There is an interaction of behavioral and linguistic forces which determine a total positive pattern of personality renewal. This to me represents the achievement of the true purpose of education.

Similarly foreign language instruction can be infused with vitality by concentration on a behavioral change in students rather than on skills acquisition as an end in itself. To the extent that anyone is prepared to be self-reliant and fully responsible in the changing social milieu of a foreign country, to this extent his proficiency is effectively measured. Again the quality and purity of language is not the foremost nor sole standard of proficiency. I am well aware that my language is not always the best by academic standards, but this does not deter me in maintaining personal contacts at home and abroad with the widest range of friends and associates.

Were I always to be a paragon of linguistic perfection I would certainly be too embarrassed to even make an appointment. And so in spite of recognizable handicaps I have the great pleasure of being in constant intellectual communion with many of the finest minds of this era. In the past when I have emphasized that our professional orientation was fundamentally humanistic, I had precisely this model in mind; namely, that our tremendous linguistic resources would give us this kind of intellectual intimacy with our counterparts whenever we may find the opportunity to establish it. For this purpose literature and all related cultural study can contribute background and substance, but in the end the unity of human experience and the reciprocal contribution of individuals in sustaining and ennobling mankind must be constantly paramount.

Factor 5. Instruction is oriented toward a basic moral value. We have allowed ourselves in this society of social welfare to forget that a change in human behavior which elevates the spirit of man is a moral achievement and that we can emphasize moral values without being drawn into esoteric philosophical or theological discussions. Morality

is the activist phase of these and in this sense is the concern of behavioral change.

As we instruct these adults and open broader and broader vistas of human experience to give wings to these aspirations which inspire hope, courage, purpose and will, the satisfaction of the teacher and the student is testimony of a proficiency that is intangibly verified but not measurable. Since this instruction is primarily rooted in concern of one person for another, its results are manifested in a mutual will to please. In our era of impersonalized systems which enmesh us and leave us without effective means to stop them, we have forgotten or rejected as sentimentalism the final test of our teaching, recognizing a grateful student who has promise of being a better person than his teacher. How many of us are daily concerned with maintaining this relationship with our students, giving them as much of ourselves so that with a headstart they will finally be expanded images of ourselves!

Thus in foreign language teaching it seems to me that we should be constantly offering our students a tangible presence, through our own behavior, of the exhilaration and joy, of the intellectual stimulus and vision, of the humanistic bond which foreign language study stimulates. If we cannot do this, then we must without delay examine our own selves lest we destroy a basic potential in our students to be that which we ourselves failed to become.

NOTES

- * An address which was to be delivered at the banquet of the Pacific Northwest Conference on Foreign Languages on April 3, 1970. A concatenation of events, well documented in the log of O'Hare Field, Chicago, effectively detained me there so that the address could not be given. With equal determination, technology also failed. Relaying the address from tape to tape by telephone proved ineffective. I regret that for the first time in my career I failed in fulfilling a responsibility of this kind. I offer, herewith, my apology to all who may have just grievance against me because of this failure.
- 1. Cf. "Notes and News" The Modern Language Journal, Vol. LIV, No. 2 (February, 1970), p. 152.